

2020-2021



simon fraser
student society

VP UNIVERSITY RELATIONS' EXIT REPORT

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Executive Summary

This year has been one of the most challenging yet rewarding years of my life. When I ran for this position in March 2020, I had no idea that a global pandemic was on its way, and that it was going to change the entire world as we knew it.

The COVID-19 pandemic meant that the campaign platform I ran on wasn't necessarily the platform I would implement as Vice-President University Relations, and that I would have to pivot toward helping students during the stressful time that the global climate was presenting.

This year, however, also saw the reinvigoration of a radical campus, one in which advocacy and activism are at the center of student politics – where marginalized communities are at the center of all the work that we engage in.

This Board sought to Build Student Power within the SFSS. I believe we accomplished this in many ways. We embarked on a massive organizational restructuring, that directed power away from a centralized, unrepresentative board, to Council, which is better representative of the student body, and has stronger connections to the student-body as a whole.

Additionally, we hired, and are continuing to hire, various new staff members to help us better support students, and to support students in their advocacy and activism.

I have had the honor and the privilege of serving in this role for the last year. Writing this report and reflecting on all the projects I have been



able to work on has been incredibly humbling, and I hope you all enjoy reading it!



Overview

Role Breakdown

The Vice-President University Relations is a critical advocacy portfolio within the SFSS and is responsible for coordinating University and Academic advocacy initiatives, campaigns, and events. This position serves as the main liaison between the SFSS and the University, often liaising with various Departments and Directors within the University.

Challenges

A core component of my advocacy this year centered around COVID-19, and the implications it was having on students' mental, academic, and financial wellbeing. The pandemic presented challenges for many students, and especially at the beginning of the pandemic, it was particularly difficult to pressure SFU to provide proper accommodations, services, and emergency funding to students.

Points of Contact

Points of contact range depending on the project or initiative, but in general, main points of contact include:

- Senior Director of the Office of the Vice-Provost, Students and International (Main liaison between SFSS & SFU)




Projects and Initiatives – University Relations

COVID-19 Survey

At the beginning of this board term, we conducted a survey of undergraduate students to determine how the pandemic has been impacting their mental, academic, and financial health. The survey was composed of multiple questions, both multiple-choice and written, to assess what impacts the pandemic has had on students. The findings of the survey demonstrated that the initial surge of the pandemic of the pandemic through students into financial turmoil, cause mental health to decrease, and students struggled with their academics. We use the findings of the survey to run a campaign to demonstrate how students were feeling during these difficult times and cited much of the quantitative data received from the survey and our direct lobbying efforts with the University.

Tuition Freeze Advocacy + Budget Review

2020 was a historic year for the world. COVID-19 through a bigger curveball than any of us could've possibly seen coming. Despite that, however, the university board of governors still deemed it necessary to raise our tuition during a global pandemic while students' financial situation was being thrown into unpredictability. The SFSS decided to act. We were able to mobilize students around condemning the university's tuition hikes in a way that hasn't been done in years. At the 2020 annual general meeting, being held entirely virtually because of the pandemic, 600 students attended to vote on a resolution to collectively condemn SFU for this tuition hike. This motion successfully passed with over 90% in favor. This sent a clear and strong message to



the university that students have the mobilizing capacity to speak strongly against the continued exploitation of students.


Food Hub

In summer 2020, I participated in a pilot project led by our vice president external relations called the SFU food hub. This was a temporary program that we operated alongside local partners to help bring fresh produce and food to students who could not afford it. During its pilot, it was very successful. The program ran out of convocation mall, on a weekly basis. I would always try and attend and help where I could with set up, manning the booths, and distributing food to students.

Vice-President Advancement & Alumni Engagement

At the very beginning of my board term, I was selected to be the undergraduate representative on the search committee for SFU's next vice president advancement and alumni engagement. The committee serves as a representation of the campus community and conducts all the interviews for candidates applying for the position. The entire search committee process was quite lengthy, lasting from the beginning of the summer to around the beginning of the fall semester. When sitting on a hiring committee for any SFU vice president, it is critical to be honest, open, and aggressive in your values. Often, there are only two student representatives on a search committee of up to 16 people. Because of that, the student voice can often get drowned out. So, it's important to be prepared, and ready to speak up whenever possible.

Burnaby Mountain Gondola




During my tenure as VP university relations, the Burnaby Mountain gondola project has been one of my central advocacy projects. The president and I attended multiple TransLink public consultations, always attempting to speak to the importance of the gondola project to undergraduate students. I also did an interview with city news on why undergraduate support the gondola. The gondola has been the biggest project of collaboration the student society and SFU have had in a very long time, due to the gondolas very strong support among all SFU community members, not even just undergraduate students. During the spring 2021 semester, the president and I began having meetings with members of Burnaby city council, who were slated to vote on whether to allow the project to proceed in March 2021. However, city Council continues to delay the vote, and it is quite unclear when such a vote will take place. Therefore, the advocacy continues!

Advocacy to Ban RCMP Recruitment on Campus

The SFSS supports the defunding of police and the RCMP and recognizes the disproportionate impact on communities of colour and indigenous people have faced at the hands of police officers. We are fighting to dismantle and rebuild these systems and are not looking for reform. At multiple points during my term, we have attempted to bring these issues forward. These concerns were amplified after the arrest of a black alumnus in the dining hall on December 11, 2020. Since then, the relationship that the university has with campus public safety, the RCMP, and Burnaby police has been Central to community activism at SFU.

Joint Operations Group



I have had the pleasure of serving on the joint operations group for the past year, and as one of its co-chairs. The membership of this group includes the President of the SFSS, the VP University Relations, the graduate student Society Director of external relations and director of academics, the vice provost and associate vice president students and international, the executive director of student affairs, the senior director of the office of the provost, and the graduate Dan. This group is the main platform by which we as a student society directly bring concerns forward to the university. Issues of importance that we have raised at this group before include: student concerns around exam invigilating software, outrage over the tuition hikes, the December 11 arrest, the lack of student focus and the new vice president peoples equity and inclusion portfolio, what the far return to campus will look like, COVID-19 emergency funding, and so much more. This is served as a platform for any real high-level discussions and concerns to be brought forward to the University by the students.

Student Affordability Project Working Group

Study Areas Working Group

In summer 2020, I was invited to be a member of a working group that sought to open study spaces on campus for students to use during the pandemic. After the initial shut down of the school in March 2020, most study spaces were shut off from students to use. However, this working group looked at how to safely reopen study areas for students who need to come up to campus to do work or who lived on residence. The working group only operated during the summer but accomplished a lot.



Student Safety Group


I was fortunate enough to be a member of the student safety group, led by SFU's chief safety officer. It served as a forum to bring forward all student concerns related to student safety on campus. The committee membership is quite broad, and includes many different SFU staff members, representatives from the undergraduate student society, the graduate student society, and many other student groups such as out on campus, the women's center, the indigenous student center, and more.

Enrolment Appeals Committee

I was invited to be a member of the enrolment appeals committee, which looks at and considers appeals for refunds of tuition fees and tuition penalties for students who have dropped class due to extenuating circumstances. As VP university relations, I was extended membership on this committee to provide student perspective when considering these appeals. The committee typically meets once a month to review these appeals.

P/Cr/Nc Grading Scheme

By the end of the fall 2020 semester, it was clear that many students were struggling academically because of the pandemic. Working from home all the time provides many obstacles to academic success. Therefore, there was enormous pressure from undergraduates toward the University to reinstate some version of the pass/fail grading scheme that was used in spring 2020 as an emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to student advocacy and mobilizing, student senators alongside members of the SFSS board of directors were able



to push through a policy that instated the pass/credit/no credit grading scheme, which allowed students to apply the grading same to elective courses, or courses in a department within their major, minor or certificate where that department has allowed such use of the grading scheme.


Open Educational Resources (OER) + Working Group

Decreasing the cost of course materials has been a topic of discussion among undergraduate students for decades. But this conversation has been amplified even more during the pandemic. I, alongside the SFSS education representative, sat on a working group that operated out of the library that serves as a central location for OER champions on campus to figure out ways to advance the initiative.

Student Advocacy Office

During the spring 2021 semester, I lead a hiring committee for a new staff position within the SFSS called the student advocacy coordinator. This position would serve as the head of a new department called the student advocacy office. This Office service to provide advocacy for students who are in dispute with the University, I need someone who can point them in the right direction, and advocate on their behalf. The hiring process for this committee has concluded, and we are in the process of on boarding our new student advocacy coordinator. In the coming year as incoming president, I will be working with this individual to help establish the office and build it into something that students can gain a lot from.

Student Wellness Working Group




During the spring 2021 semester, the student wellness working group was struck by the University and academic affairs committee and led by our VP student services Matthew Provost. The working group was to research and determine a list of short-term action items that we could take to tackle student well-being and mental health initiatives. The working group met a couple of times during the semester, and I really enjoyed attending and participating these meetings. I'm hoping that as an incoming executive member, that this group will continue to function and then I'll be able to participate even more.

Varsity Team Name Change Campaign

During the spring 2021 semester, I worked closely with the president and the incoming VP equity and sustainability to continue to push SFU to properly consult with black and indigenous students as it relates to the final name that is chosen for the varsity team name change. Asks of the University have included: consulting with SOCA and FNSA, and expanding the name change working group to have more black and indigenous students.

Community Engagement on Personal Safety Steering Committee

As incoming SFSS president, I was invited to be a member of this new steering committee. The creation of this steering committee was a direct result of the December 11 arrest and the dining hall of a black alumnus. The chief safety officer of SFU is the leader of this group, and the group has been tasked with doing consultation and review on all policies related to campus public safety. Thus far, the committee has only met once. However, it became clear to me very fast that to student representatives on a group such as this, me being one of the two, was



not adequate. Consequently, I've been pushing for the expansion of the group to include more students, Specifically folks from equity second groups such as SOCA, FNSA, Women's Center, Out on Campus, and more. Additionally, I've been pushing for proper compensation of folks are putting an emotional labour on this committee, and recognition of the harm that the institution has and continues to perpetrate against black and indigenous students. I look forward to continue influencing change on this committee in the coming year.


Projects and Initiatives – Governance

Governance & Administrative Restructuring

In summer 2020, the Board of Directors underwent a substantial governance restructuring, which saw us move from a governance model now and commonly as the Carver model, where a lot of operational decisions were made by unelected administrative staff, to a model that gives the elected student representatives the power to make operational decisions that best reflect whether the student body. This new model is referred to as a policy-administrative hybrid. As chair of governance committee, I oversaw a large aspect of this restructuring, which included a large review of our board policies and administrative policies.

By-Law Review

This year's Board of Directors took on one of the most consequential and substantial by-law updates in decades. I spearheaded the effort to reform our by-laws to place more power back in the hands of students, by decentralizing power from a small unrepresentative board to the




more representative council, ensuring that every corner of campus is represented on the SFSS main decision-making body. I lead the joint byelaw working group, which oversaw the entire project. By October 2020, the working group had created a comprehensive package of amendment proposals, and they inevitably went to the students to vote on at an annual general meeting, and they successfully passed with over 90% voting in favour.

SFSS 2020 Annual General Meeting

I was designated by the Board of Directors to chair the annual general meeting planning committee. Here, I coordinated the planning of the annual general meeting. This included coordinating the logistics of how the event would run, compiling the agenda items for the meeting, and making sure that we were fulfilling all the requirements of the society under provincial law and under our by-laws. On the agenda, we had for by-law amendment packages, as well as a tuition condemnation vote against SFU. All these motions pass with the overwhelming support from students who attended. The event was an overall success, given that it was our first ever entirely virtual annual general meeting, in the middle of a pandemic.

Review of Policies

Over the course of the year, I have recommended many policy changes to the Board of Directors. In spring 2021, I created a process to be entrenched in policy call the consent agenda, which was created to try and save time at our board meetings by compiling housekeeping motions or motions that typically don't have much discussion or debate. Additionally, I proposed an amendment to standing order 1 in



our board policies that expanded on what the duties of committee chairs are, particularly in relation to how they communicate with staff and how they communicate vacant seats of their committees.

Issues Policies

As governance committee chair, I helped work on the issues policies development plan. I worked in close collaboration with multiple other board members and incoming executives to make a series of new issues policies proposals to bring to the Board, which successfully passed. These policies will ensure that future SFSS Boards/Councils will always center and include marginalized communities


Projects and Initiatives – Other

Operations Organizer Hiring Committee

I volunteer to sit on the hiring committee for the operations organizer position, which is one of the two union excluded staff that the society employees, in addition to our board organizer. The hiring of this position is one of the recommendations that stem from the executive committee as part of the administrative restructuring that was conducted in June 2020. The position is responsible for operations work, such as supporting the president and HR and other operational responsibilities

Transition Steering Committee

After the By-Law Review that successfully concluded after the passage of the By-Law proposal packages at the 2020 AGM, the board struck the transition steering committee and mandated it with overseeing the



transition into the new governance system. I was appointed chair of this group. The committee divided its task into three working groups: the governance working group, the training working group, and the operations working group. Each working group had its own mandate and was responsible for tackling specific components of the transition. I led the governance working group which was responsible for updating all of society policies to be compliant with the new By-Laws.

FARM Committee


The FARM Committee was established this Board term as a platform for faculty representatives to better discuss and advocate issues pursuant to their respective faculties. As vice president university relations, I was a nonvoting member of this committee and provided support wherever needed. This committee was unique from all our other committees because it had a rotating chair. Meaning, each member of the committee had an opportunity to practice their skills of Roberts rules as well as leading meetings.

Collective Agreement Bargaining

I was not an official member of the collective agreement bargaining committee, but as incoming president I was invited to attend bargaining sessions. This process has been super exciting to be a part of and seeing as collective bargaining was not completed before the end of this board term, I look forward to continuing to participate in the collective bargaining process.

Student Union Building Opening Plan Working Group

The Board of Directors appointed me as Chair of a Working Group to investigate how to open the Student Union Building in September 2021



safely and properly. Because of SFU's announcement that students will likely be returning to campus, this has pushed us to begin thinking about a safe opening of the Student Union Building as well. This group is composed of a mix of current and incoming Board members, as well SFSS staff members.



Recommendations

Stick to A Couple Core Projects

I recommend sticking to a couple of core project to tackle throughout the year and having very clear expectations and timelines of those core projects. By focusing on just a couple of projects, you were leaving flexibility for when unexpected events or circumstances pop up and you need to give those attention, also preventing burn out.

Start Semester Reports Early


I recommend starting your semester report as early as humanly possible, adding to the report throughout the entire semester, instead of waiting until the last week of the semester. I believe that this helps not only improve the quality of your report, but also helps encapsulate all the work that you've completed during those four months.

Fill Out Your Work Reports Consistently

I recommend consistently filling out your semimonthly work reports as consistently as possible. I would always budget at least 30 minutes after each of my meetings to try and fill out my work reports in as much detail as possible, so that I wasn't scrambling to finish my work report on the day before it was due. At times I would even fill out my work report during a meeting to ensure that I was able to properly summarize what was happening.

Have a Really Consistent & Thorough Schedule

I recommend using your Google calendar as much as possible, not only clearly and consistently adding your meetings and events to your calendar, but also budgeting time to work on specific projects and



tasks. I find that by dedicating certain amounts of time to working on specific things, that it overall improved my productivity and help me be realistic on how much work I can take on during a certain timeframe. It also helped me create boundaries between SFSS, academics, and my personal life.

Start Planning the AGM Right Away

As the chair of this year's annual general meeting planning committee, I recommend that future board members who plan the annual general meeting start as early as possible, such as in May. Planning the logistics of an annual general meeting is a big task, and I think that by budgeting as much time as possible and setting clear timelines for who is responsible for what and when these tasks need to be completed is essential to having a successful and impactful annual general meeting.

Don't take too many classes

I recommend not taking any more than three classes in any given semester while being an executive. These positions are basically full-time jobs, and so it can be very difficult to manage 4 or more classes while also balancing SFSS responsibilities.




Final Thoughts

It has been an honor to serve as an advocate for students, and to advocate on behalf of the most vulnerable and marginalized within the SFU community.

I want to give a huge shoutout to all the folks I have had a chance to work with in the past year. Whether that be on the Board, Council, student unions executives, the Graduate Student Society, or other students and student groups. I have truly enjoyed engaging with so many different people.

This Board will hold a special place in my heart due to the strong relationships and comradery that we have all built together. We have been thrown a lot of challenging circumstances over the last year, but we always stuck together, as a team, and pushed through.

Building Student Power is so much bigger than any single Board can accomplish – change does not take time, it takes pressure. That is why I am stoked to be continuing to serve on the SFSS as the incoming President for the 2021/2022 elected term to build Student Power Stronger. I believe the SFSS is headed in a positive direction, and I look forward to helping build the new governance system that we've adopted, and to



work with all the Councilors and Executive Officers who have also been elected for the 2021/2022 year!

Until next time!!

Appendices

Appendix 1: University and Academic Affairs Year End Report

Appendix 2: Governance Committee Year End Report